

Hiram sent "a cunning man of Tyre, endued with understanding, skilful to work in gold, silver, brass, iron, stone, and timber; in purple, blue, crimson, and in fine linen; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device which might be put to him." Solomon must have been well acquainted with the state of the arts in Egypt, before he began to build the temple at Jerusalem, his first wife being the King of Egypt's daughter. From his intimate connection with that country, very little doubt can therefore be entertained that he would have sent for Egyptian artists to execute the principal parts of that edifice, in which no expense was spared to make it the most perfect work in the world, had their fame or talents been reputed equal to the Tyrians. We have also the additional testimony of Homer, from whose expressions the wealth and magnificence of the Sidonians and Tyrians are apparent, as he thought it a sufficient recommendation of any work of art that it was Sidonian.

Many great cities of Asia are mentioned by the Hebrew prophets, especially Isaiah and Ezekiel, as flourishing in their time in power, riches, and magnificence, where the art of sculpture was practised on a prodigious scale; but all historical record of most of those brilliant empires which were once the seats of art and science, is almost entirely without corroborative evidence from remaining monuments, except the recent discoveries by Dr. Layard of the Nimroud sculptures, now in the British Museum, which are of the highest interest to the antiquary.

Had the materials employed for the colossal statues at Babylon, Nineveh, and the cities in the land of Shinar, been granite, marble, or good common stone, instead of gold, silver, or bronze, we should still, doubtless, with regard to mass, have had fragments worthy to be compared with those of Upper Egypt; but it must be recollected that the latter part of the period we are now contemplating is distant at least 2,500 years, since which, the dominion of the south-western districts of Asia has been successively under the control of Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Saracens, and Turks, all of whom carried off whatever they found of most intrinsic value.

Of all the countries which have been inhabited by man, Egypt possesses the most colossal, and probably the most ancient, work of sculpture. There the remains of long-departed grandeur display themselves in melancholy state, as if to defy further injuries of time. The first attempts at sculpture in all nations have generally been made in wood, but as that article is known to have been proverbially scarce in Egypt, the soft sand-stone, which they had in abundance, presented itself as the material best suited to their purpose; and it is reasonable to suppose that the tools first used were no other than the sharp edges of broken flints or hard stones. A visit to the British Museum will afford an idea of what may be accomplished in the art of carving with instruments of this description, in the figures of the South Sea idols.

There are some very large statues in Egypt wrought in granite, specimens of which are in the British Museum, but that hard material was not so much used by the Egyptians as is generally believed. Their largest statues were usually executed in sand-stone, and in many instances, without disturbing the rock from its natural situation.

The enormous statues of that country have struck every visitor with astonishment, and if we consider the time that must have been occupied in carving a figure 60 or 70 feet high in so hard and refractory a material as red granite, the boldest heart would be appalled at the incalculable labour and difficulties of the undertaking.

The Egyptian sculptors were never renowned for the excellence of their works of art, but simply for the extraordinary magnitude of them. An attentive examination of the Egyptian antiquities in the British Museum will show, that the form of their hands and feet is gross and ill-shaped, the want of anatomical knowledge remarkable, and that they are excessively deficient in grace and elegance of action. These

observations are applicable only to the original native sculpture of the Egyptians, for after the time of the Ptolemies, their sculpture was enlivened by Grecian animation, and refined by Grecian beauty. Osiris, Isis, and Orus, their chief divinities, put on the Macedonian costume, and new deities arose among them in totally different attitudes and proportions, whose characteristics were compounded of the materials of Eastern and Grecian theology. Adrian caused a number of statues to be made, in imitation of the ancient Egyptian, for the purpose of decorating his magnificent villa at Tivoli, several of which have been found, and placed in the Capitoline Museum, where they are usually considered by the common observer as genuine Egyptian productions; but they may easily be distinguished from the original works of Egypt by their style, which is superior to any of the antiquities found in that country, and by the drawing and character of them, which are decidedly Roman, though they are represented in Egyptian attitudes and dresses.

It is in vain to expect authenticity in treating of a period so remote as three or four thousand years ago, of which no regular historical records remain: we have, therefore, at this time, no means of ascertaining whether the artists who were entrusted with the execution of such gigantic statues, used any contrivances for the purpose of attaining the most perfect imitation of the human form, answering to the present use of models, casts from nature, or machines for transferring correct proportions on an enlarged scale; or, if they did, what those contrivances were; nor can we tell how the excessive labour of carving them was divided between numerous hands, so as to ensure the completion of the work to their satisfaction: neither can we estimate with accuracy the mechanical knowledge possessed by the people engaged in those extraordinary works: it was in all probability very trifling; consequently the human labour employed must have been enormous in quantity, and exceedingly painful to the workmen; yet, with the application of the wealth and power possessed by a numerous and despotic priesthood, almost anything might be accomplished which depended principally on simple manual labour.

From Plutarch and Pausanias we learn, that the material of which the primitive Greeks made their statues was generally wood, and that the lower part of all their idols was not carved before the time of Dædalus, a native of Athens. He lived about 1,300 years B.C., and had a disciple of the name of Endæus: these two are the earliest sculptors in marble on record. From that time an interval of 500 years elapsed without any particular mention of works of art in Greece, except of those which Homer states to have been executed by the Sidonians. During this long period, the Greeks were almost constantly engaged in war; and we find the poets of those early ages, indulging in the reveries of a warm and luxuriant imagination, and singing, with the greatest enthusiasm, the history of the contests and expeditions of their ancestors; and these poetical productions gave to the artists the most exalted and sublime conceptions of divinity, heroism, grace, and beauty.

About 776 years B.C., two Cretan sculptors, Dipænus and Scyllis, were celebrated for their marble statues: some of the earliest specimens of Greek sculpture in the British Museum are supposed to be the productions of these artists, or of their immediate successors.

During the fifth and sixth centuries B.C., the number and comparative excellence of statues in the island of Ægina was very great: many of those artists are recorded as having produced very superior works, and there is scarcely a city described by Pausanias which did not contain some of them. The statues which adorned both pediments of the Temple of Jupiter Panhellenius, in that island, were discovered in the year 1812, buried in the ruins of the temple; they supply the most complete example of the school of Ægina, a style highly reputed by the authors of antiquity, as being of early celebrity in Greece, and also held in great estimation ever since. These marbles may be considered as fair

average specimens of the first celebrated efforts of Greek sculpture, and although executed considerably prior to the meridian of art, are, nevertheless, far removed from its dawn.

From that time, arts, sciences, and literature, began to assume a more elevated character in Greece, and to make those rapid advances towards perfection, which not only left every other nation in a comparatively infant state, but appeared to preclude all further improvement. The most beautiful works of sculpture ever produced were executed by Greek artists, who lived about the middle of the fifth century B.C. The ancient historians, especially Pausanias and Pliny, have given us the names of many celebrated Greek statues, together with the dates of their principal works, and a vast fund of information connected with their buildings and sculptured decorations; but I have never been able to find a passage alluding directly or indirectly to their mode of practice, or their means of obtaining mechanical assistance. It is quite certain, that the talented artist, Phidias, could not have found time to execute with his own hands, all the statues and reliefs which are ascribed to him; he must have put some ingenious mechanical apparatus into the hands of his pupils, or assistants, to have enabled them to perform the greater part of the violent bodily labour required to hew the blocks of marble into nearly their intended form; but in what manner that department of the profession was conducted, is now involved in impenetrable obscurity. Although we have not the direct evidence of history, to teach us the Greek method of carving statues, we are, nevertheless, particularly rich in relics of their abilities and industry in various materials. In the British Museum there are numerous specimens of terra-cotta statues and bas-reliefs, on the backs and undersides of some of which may be seen, not only the finger-marks, but the impression from the granulated skin of the fingers of the modeller; a proof that they were well acquainted with the plasticity and use of clay for such purpose, and that they used their fingers as the best modelling tools, as is the practice of artists of the present day. From Pliny and Theophrastus we learn, that they were also acquainted with the nature and use of the material now called plaster of Paris, and, on attentively examining the backs of some of the Elgin marbles, where the work is left in a rough state, we find evident marks of tools precisely such as are used by carvers and masons at this time. Thus it appears pretty certain, that the plan of producing a model, and of working the marble, as practised by the Greeks, did not materially vary from the mode of procedure adopted by modern sculptors; but their method of transferring the form of the model to the marble, answering the purpose of what is now technically called "getting the points," is now totally unknown.

The best works of the Romans were executed by Greek artists, who settled in the imperial city after Greece had become a Roman colony, and, from that time, art gradually declined, until, in the reign of Constantine, it was impossible to find in the capital of his mighty empire, a sculptor capable of adorning the new buildings.

From a complication of causes and events, arising out of the fanaticism of the age, literature and the fine arts generally, remained in a state of concealment or darkness for the long period of nearly a thousand years. To describe the numerous contests, maintained with unabated rage and various success between the worshippers and the destroyers of images, and the extraordinary changes of feeling with which the Christian world laboured alternately to adorn their magnificent edifices, and then to obliterate every trace of sculpture, would be lamentably curious, but such an investigation is foreign to the subject of this illustration.

In the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, there were sculptors in Italy who produced statues in marble superior to any that had been executed since the time of the Greeks. The late Mr. Flaxman considered that "some of the works of that period, both in bronze and marble, might be placed beside the best productions of ancient Greece without discredit."